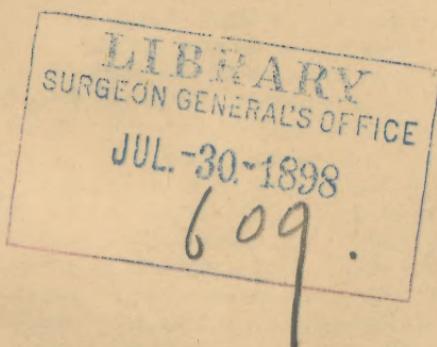


Extracts from
addresses of W. Lawson
Taft + + + + +



17/5
LIBRARY
SURGEON GENERAL'S OFFICE

JUL. -30-1898

EXTRACTS FROM

609

ADDRESSES OF MR. LAWSON TAIT,

THE EMINENT ENGLISH SURGEON, AND OTHERS,

At the Annual Meeting of the Victoria Street Society for the Total Prohibition of Vivisection, 1882.

I feel as a matter of conscience that I am bound to take part in this meeting to-day. I do not know that there is a more painful experience that a man or woman can have than an awakening of conscience, and there is hardly any one here who at one time or another has not had an awakening of conscience. I recollect when in my own mind the views I held on this matter were the ordinary views of my profession. In my early life I was closely associated with Sir William Ferguson, and I heard him express the views to which he gave utterance before the Royal Commission, which appeared to me to be little more than the eccentricity of that marvelous good nature which characterized everything that he said or did. It was not until 1872 or 1873 that I was the witness of an experiment which thrilled me with horror, which I have never related in detail, and concerning the sight of which I shall preserve silence. I am, however, bound to say that I left the room with the feeling that if such things were to be done in the pursuit of science, I should like to part company with it. In my own University (Edinburgh), we were not in the habit of seeing, for educational or experimental purposes, the amount of vivisection now introduced there, and in other medical schools. Indeed, for education we never saw experiments at all. In my own town in Birmingham, I have taken a strong stand and have persuaded an influential committee to join me for the purpose of reforming class administration in our medical schools. Upon this matter I think there is no room for discussion at all. Upon the wider question whether vivisection contributes such advances to human knowledge as has been claimed for it, or has overcome all the *a priori* objections that we all entertain towards it, is a matter of question.

The usefulness and uselessness of vivisection is a wide and somewhat difficult question on which I have made some contributions. And here again I should like to be historical on the awakening that took place in my own case, and which I venture to prophesy will take place in the mind of every unprejudiced practitioner of medicine and surgery, if he will investigate the matter. I follow the line of practice in which Spencer Wells made such a reputation. I remember the statement made by the Bishop of Peterborough in the House of Lords, that some of Spencer Wells' experiments had contributed to medical advancement. But that statement was childish, and as incorrect as anything could be. I am speaking on matters of fact within the compass of my own daily life—matters on which I am in the position to speak as

authoritatively as any man in this country, and I say that nothing could be more childish and incorrect than that statement. That assertion, however, had this important effect upon me. It led me to investigate. I have frankly admitted, what is the fact, that in the early part of my life I was a vivisectionist, and I have performed experiments for the purpose of elucidating surgical difficulties and to contribute to surgical advance; but I have also stated, which is the fact, that these experiments usually led us astray and did more harm than good. The difficulties of a position like mine towards this subject of vivisection are extreme—sometimes almost overwhelming. Two or three times I have been on the verge of resolving to be altogether silent. Medical journals entering into a hostile persecution make one impatient, and then the daily journals, swimming with the tide, are silent on our side whilst they attack us on the other side of the question. Not long since a leading article appeared in the [London] *Times* on this question, in which two illustrations were given of instances in which vivisection had advanced medical knowledge—one illustration dealt with arteries (a subject which I believe I have made peculiarly my own.) The historical facts of that article were wrong from beginning to end. I wrote a short letter to the *Times*, which would not have occupied more than a quarter of a column, but that letter has never appeared. I do not think this is a fair way of dealing with us. If the late Sir W. Ferguson is correct in the evidence which he gave before the Royal Commission, there has been no surgical advance made by vivisection. I have made a careful investigation into the history of surgical advances. This is not a matter of mere opinion—the opinion of A against B—but is a matter of careful, critical, historical examination of the records of surgical advance.

It is easy for an intelligent layman to understand whether a particular operation was done in 1796 or 1878 for the first time; and if we are told that a great surgical advance arose from vivisection experiments in 1878, when we find that forty years before it was performed frequently, and with some share of success; such investigation is open to intelligent lay criticism. Whatever may be said on matters of medicine or apart from surgery, I say that on matters surgical the claim set up on behalf of vivisection is entirely unfounded.

CARDINAL MANNING said: In an article from the pen of one of the most distinguished men of science in this country, it is said that probably one-tenth or one-twentieth of the scientific knowledge that has been added to the medical education of the country has been obtained by means of vivisection. That is a very small contribution to be obtained by the enormities and cruelties inflicted upon the lower animals. We have absolute proof of the most enormous and atrocious sufferings from the writings of men who are themselves the leaders and defenders of the practice. M.

Claude Bernard says that a physiologist "possessed and absorbed by a scientific idea does not hear the animal's cries of pain. He is blind to the blood that flows. He sees nothing but his idea, and the organisms which conceal from him the secrets that he is resolved to discover." M. de Cyon says: "He who cannot follow some fine nerve-thread, scarcely visible to the naked eye, into the depths, if possible sometimes tracing it to a new branching, with joyful alertness for hours at a time; he who feels no enjoyment when at last, parted from its surroundings and isolated, he can subject that nerve to electrical stimulation; or when in some deep cavity, guided only by the sense of touch to his finger-end, he ligatures and divides an invisible vessel—to such a one there is wanting that which is most necessary for a successful vivisector. The pleasure of triumphing over difficulties held hitherto insuperable, is always one of the highest delights of the vivisector."

I think that if we are by these practices to reduce our medical men and surgeons, and those into whose care we fall in moments of suffering, to a state of moral insensibility like this, then happy will be those who slip out of the world without passing through their hands. It appears to me that as we have the uncertainty of the result, and the certainty of atrocious and unimaginable suffering, we have a case so strong that I cannot understand any civilized man committing or countenancing the continuance of such a practice. I know that an impression has been made that those whom I represent look, if not with approbation, at least with great indulgence at the practice of vivisection. I grieve to say that abroad there are a great many (whom I *beg* to say I do not represent) who do favor the practice; but this I do protest, that there is not a religious instinct in nature, nor a religion of nature, nor is there a word in revelation, either in the Old Testament or the New Testament, nor is there to be found in the great theology which I do represent; no, nor in any act of the Church of which I am a member; no, nor in the lives and utterances of any one of those great servants of that Church who stand as examples, nor is there an authoritative utterance anywhere to be found in favor of vivisection.

Some years ago I brought the subject under the notice and authority where alone I could bring it, and those before whom it was laid soon proved to have been profoundly ignorant of the alphabet even of vivisection. They believed entirely that the practice of surgery, and the science of anatomy, owed everything to the discoveries of vivisection. They were filled to the full with every false impression, but when the facts were made known to them they experienced a revulsion of feeling. And if we are to proceed on the whole animal creation, multiplying experiments on every vein, every nerve, every muscle, every function of the body, with every drug to be applied and every surgical instrument to be used, I would ask, where is to be the end of such practice?

I quite agree with what Lord Shaftesbury said a year ago. I do not believe this to be the way that the all-wise and all-good Maker of us all has ordained for the discovery of the healing art, which is one of His greatest gifts to man. He has indeed attached labor to the drawing of the harvest out of the soil, but I do not believe the revelation of the healing art will come in the furrow of the atrocious suffering which vivisection inflicts on the lower animals. I cannot believe it. I hope that these bills will pass into law and put a check to this most atrocious practice.

CANON WILBERFORCE said: I hope very earnestly that this bill (for the abolition of vivisection) will become law during the present session of Parliament, though I have my doubts about it and for this reason: We are fighting against what is the most powerful element in man—that is, his inherent selfishness. I believe there is abroad the idea that by tormenting the lower animals man will be spared some pain and suffering. There is in this idea intense selfishness, an utter forgetfulness that there is between man and the lower animals a solidarity—a unity which, I believe, is pointed out in the word of God itself, where it says that “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” As I have said, there is an idea abroad that we can save ourselves pain by having the lower animals tormented. Nothing is so cruel as fear. Persons under the influence of panic are always cruel, and there is a kind of fear, a kind of panic, abroad which makes people cruel in their attempts to escape bodily pain—they do not care how, so long as they can escape. Now, if it could be proved that we could save ourselves pain by torturing the lower animals, I say it would be a sin against Almighty God that we should escape in that way.

If we allow this abominable practice of vivisection to go on, if we are to allow the nation to be brutalized in the name of what is called “science,” what will happen to our young students, who ought to be sent out with tender hearts and souls full of sympathy for all God’s creatures. If we are to have their feelings blunted and their hearts hardened until they can look without compassion and without emotion on the upturned pleading eyes of a dog tied down over the accursed torture trough, they had better never have gone out into the world.—*From the Zoophilist, London.*

“Well may I close this hurried *résumé* of recent advance in peritoneal surgery in recounting these brilliant achievements of Lawson Tait. By his daring and skill, he has made easy for us many things that were before attended with difficulty and danger. He is now the leader in this department of surgery, and has succeeded in opening up fields of great fertility, which we may all freely cultivate with profit.”—*Dr. Marion Sims in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL.*

